



**DECISION MEMO
COLD SPRINGS WATERSHED
AND STREAM HABITAT RESTORATION PHASE II PROJECT**

**U.S. FOREST SERVICE
SANTA ROSA RANGER DISTRICT
HUMBOLDT COUNTY, NEVADA**

BACKGROUND

Over time, several headcuts have developed within the Cold Springs watershed. The Purpose of the project is to stabilize the stream channel habitat and restore the water table in the meadow habitat on either side of the streams within the Cold Springs Pasture. This action is needed as there are a series of headcuts working up the streams in the area that are diminishing the stream quality and resistance to flood events and lowering the water table in the meadows. The reduction in stream stability and water table is contributing to reduced sage-grouse brooding habitat quality.

PROPOSED ACTION

The Santa Rosa Ranger district proposes to stabilize the headcuts present in the stream and restore water table levels in adjacent meadows within the majority of the Cold Springs Pasture. This project is located in Humboldt County Nevada T 45 N, R 45 E sections 16, 21, 22, 23, 26, 27, 34, 35, and 36. None of the streams proposed for stabilization under this proposal are perennial (ie they do not flow year round). The stabilization will be accomplished by installing modified check dams (structures) along the stream network as needed to control the channel grade and stop the upstream progression of headcuts. The check dams are designed to restore the channels natural width depth ratio and water level. The structures are buried in the soil surface using either a track-hoe or backhoe depending on how large the structure needs to be, the size of the materials used to construct the structures, and the availability of equipment. Other actions such as sloping back unstable vertical bank sections and small headcuts will occur to allow the sites to stabilize and revegetate this would also be done with the heavy equipment.

The rock structures will be built from rock that is quarried in the county. The rock source will be certified weed free by the zone botanist or other qualified designee. The track hoe/back hoe, haul truck, loader and any other mechanized equipment will be washed before entering the site to prevent weed propagules (seed and vegetative parts capable of forming a new plant) from being transported to the site.

If all of the work can be performed in one field season then the entire pasture will be rested for a minimum of two years or until the restoration sites are stabilized whichever is longer. If the restoration work will take more than one field season to complete, then in consultation with the Range Permittee, the treated areas may either be fenced and rested from grazing, or the entire

pasture rested during implementation and for two years after implementation is complete, which ever has the least impact on the permittee. It is anticipated that the work will take one to two field seasons to complete depending on weather conditions, availability of equipment and personnel. In the event of a two season implementation and the permittee electing to rest the pasture as opposed to fencing out the treatment areas this would mean a three year minimum rest of the pasture.

Archeological sites, if present, would be avoided during implementation by the heavy equipment. Structure placement would be done in consultation with the project Archeologist to ensure appropriate protection of historic and prehistoric resources that may be present in the project area.

The in channel work would be done at the time of lowest seasonal flow (mid to late summer) and would be done with clean rock to limit the introduction of sediment into the stream. Only the bucket portion of the equipment would be in the stream in the event that water is present. Any unvegetated areas larger than 6ftx6ft or if within 3 feet of the channel would be seeded and covered with mulch gathered on site. A weedeater or similar small engine powered device may be used to cut the mulch. The seed mix will be developed by the zone botanist consistent with the Forest Plan, regional and national guidance on native plant use, and probability of success.

The project area would be monitored for the first two years after implementation to ensure that the restoration was successful. Some of the treatments might be modified to make them more suited to the site conditions if they are showing signs of not successfully repairing the headcut or gully. If revegetation is not successful in the first two years then additional seeding and mulching would occur with the affected areas being temporarily excluded from livestock use until such time as there is 50% well rooted ground cover vegetation (not easily pulled up by hand).

Monitoring for new weed populations would occur and treatment of those populations would occur under the existing weed treatment authorizations.

DECISION

I have decided to authorize the project as proposed with the mitigation measures and weeds monitoring to ensure compliance with Forest Plan and applicable laws. This includes stabilizing the headcuts and gullies identified in the Cold Springs Pasture as identified in the project map below. Both mechanical and hand tools are authorized for use in stabilizing these erosional features.

This action is categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement (EIS) or an environmental assessment (EA). The applicable category of actions is identified in agency procedures as “timber stand and/or wildlife habitat improvement activities that do not include the use of herbicides or do not require more than 1 mile of low standard road construction (36 CFR 220.6(e)(6))”. This category of action(s) is applicable because through the stabilization of the headcuts and gullies as proposed in this project, the meadow hydrology will be stabilized and returned to historic conditions. Stabilizing the meadow hydrology allows the meadows to return to historic size and function as critical sage grouse habitat.



I find that there are no extraordinary circumstances that would warrant further analysis and documentation in an EA or EIS. I took into account resource conditions identified in agency procedures that should be considered in determining whether extraordinary circumstances might exist:

- Federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat, species proposed for Federal listing or proposed critical habitat, or Forest Service sensitive species – **Fisheries**- there are no perennial fish bearing waters within the treatment area. **Wildlife**- The project may impact individuals but is not likely to contribute to a trend towards federal listing or loss of viability for greater sage-grouse and pygmy rabbit. It would not result in incidental take for migratory birds and would result in stable trends for mule deer populations.

Determinations are based up on the project not being implemented between March 15 and June 30, and if implemented between June 30 and July 15, a nest search being completed for migratory birds prior to implementation. In addition, pygmy rabbit burrows would be inventoried and avoided where possible during implementation.

Botany- Potential habitats for *Botrychium spp.* were found within the project area during the field survey. Because of the extreme drought conditions within the project area, any moonwort species that may exist within the project area could have been dormant. Also, moonwort species can exist under ground for several years without emerging. Therefore, may impact individuals or habitats but is **not** likely to result in a trend to federal listing or loss of viability for the populations on upswept moonwort, dainty moonwort, slender moonwort, or moosewort

No potential habitats for whitebark pine were found within the project area nor were any individuals observed. Because this species develops consistently even in years of low precipitation and are recognizable at many of their life stages, it is unlikely that populations were overlooked. Therefore, this project will have **no impact** on this species.

Table 1. Summary determinations for Region 4 sensitive plant species with the potential to occur within the project area.

Species	Common name	Detected within project area Y/N	Proposed Action
<i>Botrychium ascendens</i>	upswept moonwort	N	MINT
<i>Botrychium crenulatum</i>	dainty moonwort	N	MINT
<i>Botrychium lineare</i>	slender moonwort	N	MINT
<i>Botrychium tunux</i>	moosewort	N	MINT

MINT: may impact individuals or habitats but is **not** likely to result in a trend to federal listing or loss of viability for the populations.

- Flood plains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds – floodplains- this project is designed to restore natural functioning to intermittent channels and their flood plains. Wetlands- this project is designed to stabilize and restore hydrologic function of several small wetlands that are currently in degraded condition. Municipal watersheds- none present

- Congressionally designated areas such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or national recreation areas – None are present
- Inventoried roadless areas or potential wilderness areas – Present, however no new roads are proposed as part of the project.
- Research natural areas – None present
- American Indians and Alaska Native religious or cultural sites – the local tribes were contacted as part of the scoping process. No sites were brought to our attention in the project area.
- Archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas – a Cultural Resources survey was completed. State Historic Preservation Office concurrence was received on April 15, 2014. No adverse effects to historic Properties are expected with the noted mitigation measures being followed.

No additional concerns were brought up during scoping that would preclude this project from being decided using a Categorical Exclusion.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT AND TRIBAL COORDINATION

This action was originally listed as a proposal on the Humboldt- Toiyabe National Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions and updated periodically during the analysis. Nevada Department of Wildlife was taken on a tour of the site prior to scoping. A scoping letter was sent to all interested parties. Tribal Consultation letters were sent to the area tribes and the District Ranger, Jeffrey Ulrich, followed up in person with the individual tribes.

FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS AND REGULATIONS

This decision is consistent with the Humboldt National Forest Land Management Plan. The project was designed in conformance with:

- Standard and Guide (HNF LRMP, pg IV-48) - degraded riparian areas as identified in Water Resources Inventory will be given high priority in the range improvement and watershed restoration programs. In addition, the causes of degradation will be eliminated.
- Standard and Guide (HNF LRMP, pg IV-47) – Install erosion control structures and seed as needed to reduce gully erosion and improve ground cover.
- Standard and Guide (HNF LRMP, pg IV-48) – adopt soil and water conservation practices in the development of projects.
- Standard and Guide (HNF LRMP, pg IV-49) – Management activities in riparian areas will be monitored and corrective action will be taken to prevent deterioration of riparian areas or degradation of water quality.

Clean Water Act- any permits needed for this project will be obtained before implementation



Migratory Bird Act- A limited operating period has been imposed that prevents activities occurring without a nest survey first being completed.

Endangered Species Act- All biological effects analyses indicated that the project is in compliance.

National Historic Preservation Act- The forest has received concurrence from the State historic preservation office.

ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW (APPEAL) OPPORTUNITIES

This project is not subject appeal.

IMPLEMENTATION DATE

Implementation may occur as soon as the decision is signed.

CONTACT

For additional information concerning this decision, contact: Robin Wignall, Hydrologist, Humboldt Toiyabe National Forest, 2035 Last Chance Road, Elko, NV 89801, (775) 778-6122.

Joseph M. Garrotto

District Ranger

Date

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